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Article Contends Rebel Operations Have US 'Blessing'

US Embassy Rwanda

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SERIAL: BR0503100897

COUNTRY: ZAIRE, BELGIUM

SUBJ: Article Contends Rebel Operations Have US 'Blessing'

SOURCE: Brussels Le Soir in French 3 Mar 97 p 8

TEXT:

[Article by Colette Braeckman]

[FBIS Translated Text] Even if it has not yet made the headlines, the arrival of the "Katangese" in Bukavu marks a turning point in the war in Zaire. It means that the conflict is no longer limited to the east of the country, that it goes beyond providing secure borders with Rwandan and Uganda, and settling the Rwandan refugee problem.

This multi-layer war is being played out in a number of phases. Phase one, which began at the end of October, led to the dismantling of refugee camps and the establishment of a "security zone" along the border. This phase will soon be over. There is every

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indication that the Alliance of Democratic Forces for the Liberation of the Congo-Zaire [AFDLC], and within its ranks the Banyamulenge working to Kigali's agenda, have attacked the Tingi Tingi refugee camp. This camp has become a military base where former Rwandan soldiers and militiamen sought refuge in the company of civilians and their families.

Relief agencies are trying to encourage women and children to leave the camp and travel east, a message repeated by Alliance "infiltrators." If this "human shield" around the last handful of Hutu extremists should disappear, battle will then be engaged between the Alliance forces and the most determined of the Rwandans, a battle which could prove murderous.

The Alliance includes a number of composite groups, including Banyamulenge Tutsis and Zairian fighters, all determined to eliminate once and for all those who carried out the genocide and anxious to remove the final obstacle before Kisangani. There are also reports of Belgian paratroopers outside Tingi Tingi, men who travelled here on their own initiative in order to avenge the deaths of their 10 companions.

The fate of the Rwandans, whether refugees or fighters, and however controversial it may be, is just one phase in the war. The arrival of Katangese reinforcements now involves other players and no doubt other objectives. The Luanda government must certainly have been informed of the departure, by large capacity aircraft of Russian origin, or by truck, of several thousand experienced soldiers who were members of its own Army.

Angola's involvement can be explained by the fact that Jonas Savimbi's UNITA [National Union for the Total Independence of Angola] was always protected in Zaire, which offered it fallback bases during 15 years of war. Still today, at a time of slow progress in implementing the UN-backed demobilization, UNITA is accused of maintaining bases in the Kamina area which are home to some of their best fighters. Some 2,000 or 3,000 of them helped the Zairian Army and General Abilio Kamalata "Numa," commander of the northern region, was seriously wounded in the battle for Bunia. The involvement of the 'Katangese' alongside the Alliance forces may also, at a later stage, make it possible to put an end to UNITA's bases in Zaire....

The war launched by the Alliance is also clearly allowing several neighboring countries to settle some old scores with the Mobutu regime, and it is difficult to imagine that operations on such a scale on several different fronts could have been possible without at least the blessing of the United States. The United States is putting all its weight behind the dos Santos government and the US company Chevron plans to invest \$3 million in a joint venture with the Angolan company Sonangol.

There remains the third stage of this multi-layer war: The future of Zaire itself. Whether or not a surrounded Kisangani is going to fall is no longer the problem: Laurent Kabila has shown proof of his military power and, in the event of negotiations, he is in a position to dictate the terms. Terms which include the removal

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of the "Mobutist" system but which could include an honorable discharge for President Mobutu himself.

Negotiations, whether in Cape Town or anywhere else, are concerned with stopping the fighting in order to limit the war damage. But, above all, they are concerned with the transition: How to bring stability to the country, share power during the transitional period, and finally organize the truly democratic elections all Zairians desire. While neighboring countries have been involved in the war in varying degrees, it seems that all parties are now pressing for negotiations so that stability can come to Zaire as quickly as possible and, at the same time, to the region as a whole.

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